

Foundations of Practice

*Community Development
Core Competencies for
Extension Professionals*

The North Central Community Development program leaders recognized the increasing need for Extension professionals to have basic knowledge and skills in the processes, tools and techniques of community development work. Working in collaboration with the other Regional Rural Development Centers and CSREES-USDA, a conceptual framework was developed in 2004 and presented at the inaugural National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals conference in February 2005. The intent was to develop a framework, referred to as the Foundations of Practice, to provide a common language and understanding of community development work, recognizing that states and regions offer a wide breadth of educational programs in this area. The paper is available at <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/projects/corecomp/fop.pdf>.

Community, in this context, is defined as community of place—a geographic place. Community is the “unit of analysis” and therefore viewed from a complex, holistic perspective. As such, communities are comprised of dynamic, diverse and interdependent interactions between individuals, groups, organizations and institutions, both internal and external to the community. Understanding this context is fundamental to community development work.

The Foundations of Practice is composed of three major components.



COMPONENT

1

Understanding
Communities and
their Dynamics

COMPONENT

2

Developing Successful
Community Initiatives

COMPONENT

3

Areas of Specialization
and Emphasis

COMPONENT

1

Understanding Communities and their Dynamics—A Distance Education Program



Understanding Communities and their Dynamics, component one of the Foundations of Practice: Community Development Core Competencies program, is a series of seven core competencies that focuses on the ability to understand community of place, the nature of public issues, the dynamics and interdependencies of the various segments of the community, and the basics of community development work. All Extension professionals who work in a community context may find these competencies useful, regardless of their program responsibilities.

In the North Central region, we are implementing component one through a distance education program. A series of seven 1.5 hour sessions are being offered four times in 2006 through WisLine, a Web-based conference system, and a phone line. The sessions will be held from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. Central Standard Time on:

- Tuesdays, March 14 – April 25
- Wednesdays, March 15 – April 26
- Tuesdays, September 19 – October 31
- Wednesdays, September 20 – November 8 (No session on 11/1)

1. Introduction to the Series and Basic Understanding of Community

Instructors: Janet Ayres (IN) and Stephen Jeanetta (MO)

The ability to more fully understand the complexity and dynamics of issues and situations in a community context is important to be able to develop effective programs.

2. Community Demographics

Instructor: Andy Lewis (WI)

The ability to understand the demographic profile and trends in a community is essential to identifying issues and sustainable alternatives.

3. Community Economics

Instructor: Bill Pinkovitz (WI)

The ability to understand the economic base of a community and the dynamics between the various economic sectors, including the ways in which money turns over in the community, leaves the community, or is invested is important in providing a vibrant economy.

4. Community Power Structure

Instructor: Janet Ayres (IN)

The ability to identify who the decision makers are in the community, the resources they affect, and the power structure is crucial in gaining access to a community, gaining trust and credibility, and being effective in educational programs.

5. Natural Resources and Sustainability

Instructor: Mary Emery (NCRCRD)

The ability to understand the impact of decisions on the quality of natural resources and the long-term sustainability of the environment is an important component of community development.

6. Community Situational Analysis

Instructor: Phil Alexander (MI)

The ability to analyze a particular issue or situation in a community from a historical, political, cultural and community context and determine Extension's role in the issue is an important component of community development.

7. Community Development Process and Evaluation of this Series

Instructor: Tim Borich (IA)

The ability to know how to organize and mobilize resources for action, as well as possible barriers, is necessary in developing programs that are meaningful and effective.

COMPONENT 2

Developing Successful Community Initiatives— A Regional Workshop



Planning Team:

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Developing Successful Community Initiatives, component two of the Foundations of Practice: Community Development Core Competencies program, focuses on the ability to carry out community development processes to achieve measurable impacts. These process skills may be of value to all extension professionals, especially those new to community development work. These skills include:

- Principles of Community Development Practice
- Broad-based Participation and Bringing People to the Table
- Participatory Planning (includes visioning, assessment and analysis, and plan development)
- Implementation and Project Management
- Facilitation of Group Meetings
- Community Collaborations
- Evaluation (includes participatory evaluation, indicators and benchmarks, measuring impacts)

In the North Central region, these will be taught in a regional workshop November 1-3, 2006. The purpose of the workshop is to build the competencies of Extension staff. It also enables Extension professionals within the region to network with each other and learn about their programs. Participants in this workshop will be identified by the North Central Community Development program leaders. Visit <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/projects/corecomp/component2.htm> for more information.

COMPONENT 3

Areas of Specialization and Emphasis



Areas of Specialization and Emphasis, component three of the Foundations of Practice: Community Development Core Competencies program, focuses on the specific content areas of community development. As Extension professionals become proficient in the first two components, many will likely expand their effectiveness as community development professionals by specializing in one or more areas. The general specialization categories include:

- Economic Development (including entrepreneurship, business retention and expansion, tourism, etc.),
- Local Government
- Natural Resources (including land use)
- Group Process and Facilitation
- Organizational Development (working with nonprofits)
- Leadership and Civic Engagement (including conflict management and public issues education)
- Community Services
- Workforce Development

These programs are offered through regional workshops and multi-state interest groups. Linkages with programs offered through the other regional rural development centers will be established. An inventory of North Central community development staff, programs, curricula and materials are available at <http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/cdinv/index.htm>.



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